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Sport, Poverty and Education

Moray House School of Education Election Briefings

Education from early years to 18
Research and Practice Contributing to Policy

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Sport, Poverty and Education

Access to sport can alter life chances and advance educational achievement

Sportⁱ provides for both formal and informal education. The potential of sport to improve lives, help with the means to escape poverty and enhance educational achievement has yet to be fully realised and understood in Scotland. Sport can be a multi-faceted force for change and have far-reaching and multiple influences. It can help peoples' development, raise aspirations, and be a source of hope across different demographics in society.

Sport should be embedded at every level of Scottish education particularly in areas of concentrated poverty. Universities are well placed to continue playing an integral part in developing the role of sport in the Scottish education system. Sports' ethos and potential to improve life chances fits well with the ethos of Scottish Universities. Universities and sport are resources of hopeⁱⁱ. Universities are part of the fabric of Scottish life, fulfill the aspirations and hopes of many and because they have stood the test of time are ideal for building other things around them.

Key points for consideration

- Appreciate the role Scottish Universities can play in reaching out through sport to disadvantaged communities and providing sports education in disadvantaged communities, not just in Scotland but certainly Scotland.
- The University of Edinburgh provides access to education through sport, delivers innovative sports' education that reaches many disadvantaged areas in Scotland and is evidencing the social value of sport in the world todayⁱⁱⁱ.
- The daily mile run now taken up by some 500 primary schools has improved fitness levels, behaviour and concentration levels. Scottish evidence shows that 60 minutes of sport could add a grade to academic performance.^{iv} UK evidence consistently reports on positive links between sports involvement and educational achievement^v.
- Listen to research evidence from athletes who say, "I run to escape poverty... I run to change my life and the life of my children^{vi}"

ⁱ See <http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/> for an extended version of this brief and access to sources

ⁱⁱ Jarvie, G. (2014). 'Universities as Resources of Hope and Progress in a Changing and Challenging World' in Reid, G and Woo Lee, J (ed) Social Justice in Sport Development. Brighton: LSA. 35-49.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ed.ac.uk/education/institutes/spehs/academy-of-sport/impact>

^{iv} See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-24608813>.

^v See

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416279/A_review_of_the_Social_Impacts_of_Culture_and_Sport.pdf

^{vi} See <http://www.scotsman.com/news/grant-jarvie-and-michele-sikes-kenyans-driven-to-succeed-1-2453665>

Briefing

While the tangible benefits of education to individuals and communities are widely accepted the contribution of sport to both formal and informal education is not well understood today in Scotland. As we strive to widen access to our further education institutions and Universities we need to make a strong case for using sport to improve educational attainment from an early age.

Education through sport is popular and sustainable and is a critical tool in tackling social and economic disadvantage. The most recent comprehensive systematic UK study of poverty and access to sport for young people identifies nine factors affecting sports' participation. The most important are free access to sports' provision; strong and healthy communities, the need to attract young people to sport before they leave school^{vii}. There is a direct correlation between poverty and lack of sports' participation amongst certain groups and yet sport also helps people escape from poverty and access education.

Sport Matters

Sport matters not just for its own sake but because of what it can contribute to other areas of public life and provision. Education through sport initiatives are proven to boost educational capability, confidence, mental health and other learning skills that help not just education levels but working and social lives.

The role of the community is important. Sport can facilitate crucial partnerships to deliver education through sport in different communities. Moray House research on the role of Edinburgh-based Spartans Football Club and Barcelona Football Club evidences how local sports-based interventions support pathways into education and employment.

Investment in sports-based interventions has a successful track record. Projects such as Vencer^{viii}, have long been used to help at-risk youth develop job skills, become entrepreneurs, or return to the formal education system

Public spaces

Safe, easily accessible public spaces encourage young people to participate in sport. One of the most consistent findings from studies attempting to explain drop-out rates for sport amongst young girls is the need for safe, secure public spaces^{ix}.

Negative signage, cost and unsafe public spaces can be barriers to the development of a thriving, aspirant, public realm in which sport is available to all. "No Ball Games Here" is hardly an invitation to be active in the outdoors, and it is a pity that initiatives carried forward by community groups in Glasgow and Edinburgh to have car-free streets to allow children to play outdoor sport are thwarted on the grounds of cost.

What needs to be done?

- More targeted free provision.
- Building education through sport outreach programmes around safe and sustainable University spaces in local communities.
- Better supervision of parks and play areas.
- Daily quality physical education.

^{vii} See LSE (2015) Moving the Goal Posts Full Report at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/casereport95.pdf>

^{viii} See Spaaij, R. (2012). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232881244_Building_social_and_cultural_capital_among_young_people_in_disadvantaged_communities_lessons_from_a_Brazilian_sport-based_intervention_program

^{ix} Bilsborough, P, Jarvie, G and Thompson I (2009) Active Stirling Report. Stirling Council.

- Early years interventions and affirming the right of every child to access sports' activities.
- Maximising the lure and adventure of sport reading to boost reading levels.
- Maximising the potential of Game Changer interventions provided by Football Foundations in partnership with higher education to help provide access to education.
- Extend the Winning Students sports bursary scheme.
- Grasp the potential of the 151 sportscotland Community Sports Hubs
- Sports clubs, including university sports clubs, actively supporting refugee communities
- Mainstream cash back funding for sport in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Dedicated research council funding for sports research.

Conclusion

Education is one of the greatest drivers to eradicate poverty and the concentration of poverty in areas of multiple deprivation. Sport can play a major role in Scottish education if the political will is there to unlock the potential of the social toolbox that is sport.

Scotland is rich with policy ideas and opportunities do exist to build upon existing infrastructure, institutions and policy directions. Further investment is necessary but the educational potential of sport should not be decided on grounds of cost but on its effectiveness and ability to transform lives.

In 2015 UNESCO issued a call to action for international policy makers to invest further in sport and physical education on the grounds that it was integral to greater educational attainment. In Scotland we should rise to that challenge.

There are few spheres of our national life that can compete with the combined power of sport and education to make a real difference. Sport can be a resource of hope, it can assist with advancing educational achievement.

Great leaders understand this. "Sport has the power to change the worldand create hope where once there was despair"^x. Nelson Mandela, May 25th 2000.

^x See <http://www.scotsman.com/news/grant-jarvie-we-have-sporting-chance-of-a-better-world-1-3951043>

Further information

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